WWC Webinar: How Administrators Can Communicate the Need for Evidence-Based Decision Making

Responses to Attendee Questions

How can new programs be added and reviewed? How long does it take to see new reviews?

Christopher Weiss, Institute of Education Sciences: The WWC is adding new research continuously, with new programs primarily added through systematic evidence reviews and through reviews of individual studies. Programs and interventions are identified for review through a prioritization process for each topic area. More information about these processes is available through the WWC FAQ.

The WWC also welcomes suggestions for programs to review. To nominate an intervention for review, the WWC's Help Desk contains an online submission form.

The length of time for a new review to appear depends on whether the review is conducted as part of a systematic review or if it is reviewed for another purpose.

Can you provide a description of what is considered "sample" and setting"?

Bridget Thomas, Quality Information Partners: In research, a *sample* is a group of people or items drawn from a larger population for measurement. The researcher draws a sample from the population of interest (e.g., preschool students, high school science teachers, school administrators). The sample is a subset of the population that is meant to represent the population as a whole. Individuals within the sample are called participants.

- If you were interested in whether a particular reading curriculum had an effect on 2nd graders, you would draw a sample of 2nd graders in order to implement the curriculum and test the outcomes of using it.
- The sample should be representative of the population of interest, so that your findings can be reasonably generalized to the larger population. For example, if you are interested in the effect of mentoring on low-income students, you would not draw a sample of high-income students.
- The necessary sample size is determined based on the type of statistics that you will be using to analyze the data.

A research *setting* is the physical environment in which a study is conducted and/or data is collected. In education studies, typical settings include classrooms, schools, playgrounds, or other school facilities. It is also possible that participants may be brought to a separate laboratory setting for data collection.

- When considering the relevance of research data or evidence to your question or situation, it is important to consider the setting. If you want to determine whether an anti-bullying intervention is likely to be effective in your urban, public junior high school, studies conducted in

private, suburban elementary schools cannot be assumed to be providing information relevant to your particular situation.

- At minimum, judging the similarity of a study's setting to yours includes issues like school size and location (urban, suburban, or rural).

**Sample and setting are important considerations under ESSA's tiers of evidence. To meet the standard for Strong Evidence defined in U.S. Department of Education regulations, both the population (and thus the sample) and the setting must be similar to your population and setting. To meet the standard for Moderate Evidence, either the population or the setting must be similar to your population or setting.

What is meant by the term "buy-in"?

Heather Boughton, Ohio Department of Education: "Buy-in" means that if you are going to start implementing a new strategy, program or intervention – thinking through in advance how your educators, students and families, and community will perceive and support that activity is an important consideration. All else equal, if you have two evidence-based programs or strategies that could help you meet your needs and – for whatever reason – one is likely to be rejected outright and/or not embraced by your teachers, then that is really helpful to think about as you make decisions. That isn't to say that you might not still choose the strategy that is going to be more challenging to get others on board with – but you'll want to be very intentional in how you approach change management and plan ahead for potential concerns. Of course, one way to try to mitigate resistance to change or implementation of new ideas/programs is to involve your stakeholders in the process of developing solutions.

If a study met the criteria for Tier 1, but I am in a rural area and the study was Tier 1 in an urban area, would I be able to call it Tier 2 since the population is the same, but the setting is different?

Lyzz Davis, American Institutes for Research: Yes. If the population overlaps but not the setting and is otherwise eligible for Tier 1, it would be considered Tier 2 for that district.

Are there evidence-based strategies that align with Title IV, Part A?

Christopher Weiss, Institute of Education Sciences, and Lyzz Davis, American Institutes for Research: The mission of the WWC is to review the existing research on different programs, products, practices, and policies in education to provide educators with the information they need to make evidence-based decisions. However, there are several other government repositories that review evidence on interventions that impact children and schools, reviews that may be of use and interest to WWC users. Information on these – and links – can be found in a recent NCEE blog post.

Why do you think evidence-based practices aren't always used by districts?

Heather Boughton, Ohio Department of Education: One challenge in encouraging the use of evidence-based practices is a misunderstanding about what it means for something to be evidence-based – and, related – a belief that "all evidence is created equal."

Understanding that the ESSA definition of evidence-based practices has raised the bar in terms of what we consider to be 'evidence-based' is an important steps towards increasing the use of evidence-based practices. In the past, if we were using best practices, we might say to ourselves that we were using evidence-based practices. But now the difference is that evidence-based practices means something specific – while its very unclear what it means for something to be a "best practice." Best practice based on what?

Historically, research hasn't really been designed or communicated with districts in a way that makes sense for them or increases the likelihood of use. Language, format, timing… all these things can create practical barriers for practitioners to actually benefit from research.

Related - there is a there is a growing body of research about districts' use of research and data (some of which has been featured on your webinars!) – this is worth looking at more closely as we think about how to encourage the use of evidence at the district level. Some things worth reading:

- http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/ - See the word document on "Evidence Use in Massachusetts

- Here's an IES write up: https://ies.ed.gov/director/remarks/11-14-2018.asp

- http://wtgrantfoundation.org/digest/piece-action-three-district-leaders-fostering-research-use

- Some of the NNERPP reports and supports might speak to this: http://nnerpp.rice.edu/

To what extent policymakers and educators are looking to WWC and research broadly because they are required to by ESSA and other laws, granting foundation, etc. If so, what can researchers do to make this a more authentic and less compliance-driven exercise?

Heather Boughton, Ohio Department of Education: The degree to which policymakers and educators will view this as another compliance exercise – vs. a real opportunity to effect change through research and data use – is going to vary widely. For some, I would venture to say that even if they want to move beyond a compliance focus, being able to really do so requires a fair amount of knowledge and resources; it is not easy work, especially when you are talking about moving a large organization in that direction. So even in the case where an organization wants to embrace an evidence-based mindset and prioritize the use of evidence-based strategies, they may need to lay out short-term goals that help them meet requirements, plus a long-term plan for moving beyond just meeting requirements.

For Ohio, as well as a number of other states, we are very clear that we do not want this to be merely a compliance exercise. We believe there is inherent value in using evidence-based strategies because they will improve our ability to serve our students well. Some things that are important in reducing compliance-focus and increasing overall use of evidence, data and research generally:

- Willingness of researchers to be our partners in this work – and I am increasingly thinking about how partnership can mean working with us in different ways to help facilitate the *use* of the

data, not just providing outcomes from a research study.   A report does not help most of us. A report combined with a tool-kit, or facilitated discussion, etc… might be of more practical value.

- Being able to share success stories from districts in which the connection between evidence use and improved outcomes (student or otherwise) are apparent – the proof is in the pudding, as they say.

- Acknowledgment that student outcomes are not the only outcomes of value – being able to speak to return on investment and cost savings is important, especially in cases where districts are going to have to justify expenses to their boards.

- Acknowledgement that the practical, on-the-ground experience of our educators is important – and all the evidence in the world can point us towards a particular practice, but if that practice isn't something that the district staff, students or community will be in support of carrying out with fidelity, and sustainably… we shouldn't rush to judgement if the district isn't just following the evidence.

- Increased emphasis on short-cycle evaluations that are designed to help districts *improve* interventions, not just arrive at a "worked/didn't work" conclusion. The latter is particularly problematic in an area where failure to produce expected results can a scary prospect - so if we can encourage the use of evidence, research and analysis in settings where the goal is continuous improvement.

Does the WWC website have any examples of districts that have presented strong evidence in their schoolwide plan using blending and braiding of federal funding?

Christopher Weiss, Institute of Education Sciences, and Heather Boughton, Ohio Department of Education: The WWC website does not have specific examples of this approach.